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LETTER-TO-THE-EDITOR

We Fear Cafta's Defeat Would Bring Disaster

U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman's advocacy of free trade ("Why Fear Cafta?" editorial page, May 10) can be taken a step further. For half a century the people of my nation, Costa Rica, have produced the largest and most reliable economic environment in Central America. Along the way, we have established strong trade, investment and cultural ties to the U.S. To turn away from free trade now would reverse five decades of economic, social and political progress in our nation. It also would send a catastrophic message to our economically developing neighbors.

Cafta presents opportunities and challenges for us all, but its passage is a necessary step in our region's evolution. The agreement fosters the economic and democratic reforms, government transparency, and labor and environmental protections that are vital to the long-term security of the hemisphere. The domestic and foreign investors I advise understandably expect regulatory consistency and a level playing field legally. Cafta provides both.

Our nations do not seek an unfair trade advantage over the U.S. The fact is, we already are excellent trading partners, constituting a \$12 billion annual export market for U.S. goods and services that is comparable to France, and is larger than those of India, Indonesia, and Russia combined.

For my nation, a defeat of Cafta could imperil our telecommunications, information technology, financial services, insurance, and tourism industries, and adversely impact those of our well established U.S. trading partners as well.

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